



The
Sermon on the Mount
A Practical Exposition

BY CHARLES GORE

M.A., D.D. EDIN.

OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE RESURRECTION
CANON OF WESTMINSTER



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PREFACE

THERE is no plant in the spiritual garden of the Church of England which at the present moment needs more diligent watering and tending than the practical, devotional study of Holy Scripture. The extent to which spiritual sloth, or reaction against Protestant individualism, or the excuse of critical difficulties is allowed to minister to the neglect of this most necessary practice, is greatly to be deplored. It is surprising in how few parts of the Bible critical difficulties, be they what they may, need be any bar to its practical use.

The present exposition is, I trust, based upon a careful study of the original text, but it is, as presented, intended simply to assist ordinary people to meditate on the Sermon on the Mount in the Revised Version, and to apply its teaching to their own lives. If it proves useful, I hope, as occasion offers, to follow it up with other similar expositions of St. Paul's epistles to the Romans and Ephesians, and the epistles of St. John.

My original intention was to publish some lectures given in Westminster Abbey on the Sermon on the Mount in Lent and Easter, 1895. But the attempt to correct for the press a report of those lectures was practically abandoned, and the exposition as now printed is a new one.

It is intended to suggest thoughts rather than to develop them, and to minister to practical reflection rather than to intellectual study; and I have ventured, in view of this

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latter aim, to omit almost all references and discussions such as involve footnotes.

I owe as much gratitude as usual to the Rev. Richard Rackham, my brother in the Community of the Resurrection, for help in the correction of proofs.

C. G.

RADLEY,
All Saints' Day, 1896.

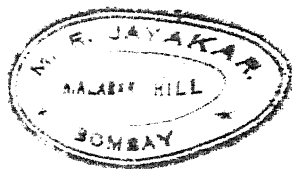


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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

CHAPTER I

THE SERMON

i.

WHAT is the Sermon on the Mount? It is the moral law of the kingdom of Christ, or in other words it occupies in the New Testament the place which in the Old Testament is occupied by the Ten Commandments. It is thus an excellent example of the relation of the two divine 'testaments,' or rather covenants, to one another. There is a sentence of St. Augustine's on this subject which it would be useful for every one to have constantly in mind. 'We do wrong,' he says, 'to the Old Testament if we deny that it comes from the same just and good God as the New. On the other hand, we do wrong to the New Testament if we put the Old on a level with it¹.' This is a general statement of the

¹ *De Gest. Pelag.* v. (15).

relation between the two covenants, and it applies especially to the moral law. The moral law of the Old Testament, as it is expressed in the Ten Commandments, was the utterance of the same God who now speaks to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It reappears here in the Sermon on the Mount, but deepened and developed. We may say with truth that the Sermon on the Mount supersedes the Ten Commandments; but it supersedes them by including them in a greater, deeper, and more positive whole.

This Sermon on the Mount, then, is the moral law of the new kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of the Messiah. We have been used to think of the Messiah, the Christ, as an isolated figure; but the Messiah whose advent is expected in the Old Testament is only the centre of the Messianic kingdom. Round about the king is the kingdom. The king implies the kingdom as the kingdom implies the king. Thus the way in which Christ announced His Messiahship was by the phrase 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' And now—now that He has gathered round Him His first disciples—He takes them apart, and there on the mountain He announces to them the

moral law of the new kingdom to which they are to belong. Thus it is a law not only for individual consciences, but for a society—a law which, recognized and accepted by the individual conscience, is to be applied in order to establish a new social order. It is the law of a kingdom, and a kingdom is a graduated society of human beings in common subordination to their king.

But observe, what we have here is law—law, not grace. In St. Paul's phrase, it is letter, not spirit. When St. Paul says that 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life'¹, he means this—that an external written commandment (that is, the letter) is capable of informing our consciences, of telling us what God's will is, of bowing us down to the dust with a sense of our inability to fulfil it; but it is not capable of going further. Thus it 'killeth'; it makes us conscious of our sin, of our powerlessness, but it leaves it for something else to put life into us to do the thing we ought. That life-giving power is the Spirit. Thus the law, by informing, kills us: the Spirit, by empowering, gives us life. Observe, it is a good, a necessary thing to be thus killed. The perilous state is 'to be alive without the law,' that is, to have an unen-

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 6.

² Rom. vii. 9.

lightened conscience and be living in a false peace. 'If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.' The first thing is to know what we ought to do; and the very fact that we feel our powerlessness to do it, makes us ready to offer the cry, the appeal for divine help.

Again I would ask you to notice a sentence of Augustine's, which is full of meaning: 'The law was given that men might seek grace; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled¹.'

Thus what we have here, in the Sermon on the Mount, is the climax of law, the completeness of the letter, the letter which killeth; and because it is so much more searching and thorough than the Ten Commandments, therefore does it kill all the more effectually. It makes us all the more conscious of sin; all the more full of the clamorous demand that God, who asks such things of us, shall give us also the power to fulfil them. But just as in many departments of human life 'man's necessity is God's opportunity,' just as in some well-constructed drama the very culminating moment of difficulty suggests the immediate arrival of release, so it is here. The divine

¹ *De Sp. et Lit.* 34.

requirement is pressed home with unequalled force upon the conscience, but it is pressed home not in the form of mere laws of conduct, but (as we shall see) as a type of character,—not out of the thick darkness by an inaccessible God, but by the Divine Love manifested in manhood and pledging His own faithfulness that he who hungers shall be satisfied and he who asks shall be heard. The hard demand of the letter is here in the closest possible connexion with the promise of the Spirit.

ii.

You will often see it noticed that a resemblance to some of the precepts in the Sermon on the Mount is to be discovered, not only in the Old Testament, on which the whole is confessedly based, but in the sayings of Jewish fathers, or in heathen philosophers and writers, like Confucius among the Chinese, and Socrates or Plato among the Greeks; and this has at times distressed Christians jealous of the unique glory of their religion. Thus they have sometimes sought to account for the coincidences between 'inspired' and 'uninspired' authors, or between the divine and the human speakers, by supposing that even heathen writers borrowed

from the Old Testament. They were forgetting surely a great truth, a truth of which in the early centuries the minds of men were full : that Christ is the Word ; and it is through fellowship in the Word, who is also the Reason of God, that all men are rational. Christ, therefore, is the light which in conscience and reason lightens every man from end to end of history. Christ has been at work, moving by His Spirit in the consciousness of man, so that the whole moral development of mankind, the whole moral education of the human race, is of one piece from end to end. There moves in it the same Spirit, there expresses itself the same Word. So that, as we should expect, there are fragments of the moral truth which in the Sermon on the Mount is completely delivered, fragments—greater or smaller, we need not now discuss—to be found among the Chinese, the Japanese, the Greeks, the Indians, because God left Himself nowhere without witness, the witness of His Word and Spirit in the hearts of men¹.

But what we also find to be true is, that the moral law here given supersedes the moral law as it is found among heathen nations or even among the Jews, by including it in a greater

¹ See especially St. John i. 4-12, Rom. ii. 14-16, Acts xvii. 22-31.

whole. We may compare the morality of this Sermon with that expressed by other religious teachers in several ways.

1. The Sermon on the Mount compared with the summaries of moral duty belonging to other religions is comprehensive while they are fragmentary. No moral code can be produced which approaches this in completeness or depth. There is no other moral code belonging to an accepted and ancient religion for which any educated European could even claim finality and completeness. We know what John Stuart Mill, though not a believer, said about our Lord's moral teaching. He said 'Not even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Jesus Christ would approve our life.' And Dr. Pusey commented on that by saying 'If men would set this before themselves, there would be fewer unbelievers¹.' There is then, I say, no other moral summary belonging to an ancient religion on behalf of which a man of modern enlightenment could, with a reasonable

¹ Mill's *Three Essays on Theism*, p. 255. Pusey's *Univ. Sermons*, 1864-72, 'God and human independence,' p. 10, note 1.

chance of being listened to, make the claim that its principles can never be outgrown or found insufficient for any race of men. This is to others as the comprehensive to the fragmentary.

2. It is as the pure to the partially corrupt or mixed. Origen, in commenting on the words of the twelfth Psalm, 'the words of the Lord are pure words, even as the silver which from the earth is tried and purified seven times in the fire,' contrasts in this respect the sacred writings of the heathen with those of the Christians. 'For though there are *noble* words among those who are not Christians, yet they are not *pure*, because they are mixed up with so much that is false.' Take for an example the Symposium of Plato. You find in it much that is most noble about divine love; but you find this noble element mixed with dross, that is with acquiescence in some of the foulest practices of Greek life. The same is true of the sacred books of Buddhism. The Sermon on the Mount, then, is to other moral codes as the pure to the mixed or partially corrupt.

3. It is as teaching for grown men, who are also free, compared to teaching for children and slaves. It teaches, not by negative enactments or by literal enactments at all, but by

principles, positive and weighty principles, embodied in proverbs which must be apprehended in their inner spirit and reapplied continually anew as circumstances change.

4. Lastly, it differs from other codes by the authoritative sanction which is given to the words by the person of the speaker. 'He spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' All the weight of His mysterious person, all the majesty of His tone, His demeanour, His authority, go to give sanction to this law which He uttered: and not only to give it sanction, in the sense of making men feel that they were dealing with one whose mysterious power it would be better not to offend: His person gives sanction to His words also by inspiring the profoundest confidence that He who makes the claim will also provide strength to correspond with it.

iii.

I must say one word about a problem which could not by any means be satisfactorily dealt with in the space now at our disposal.

We know that the critics of the Gospel narratives are in our time occupied with nothing so much as with the difficult problem

of the relation which the Gospels bear to one another. This problem presents itself in connexion with our present subject.

The Sermon on the Mount as given in St. Matthew corresponds, though with many differences, to what you find scattered over a great number of different chapters in St. Luke—vi. 20-49, xi. 1-4, 9-13, 33-36, xii. 22-31, 58-59, xiii. 24-27, xiv. 34-35, xvi. 13, 17-18¹. Now what are we to say about the relation of these two accounts of the same teaching? There is a good deal that is most characteristic in St. Matthew's sermon which has nothing corresponding to it in the other evangelist, e.g. the spiritual treatment of the Commandments and of the typical religious duties of prayer, almsgiving and fasting; but where they are on the same ground they are often so closely similar that it is plain they are drawing from the same source. Whether this source was oral or written is a question we need not now discuss; but what are we to say of the different treatment of the same material?

It is throughout the method of St. Matthew to collect or group similar incidents or sayings.

¹ The Sermon with the parallel passages is given at length in Appendix I, pp. 190 ff.

Thus he gives us a group of miracles (ch. viii-ix), a group of seven parables (ch. xiii), a long denunciation of the Pharisees which is represented in two different passages of St. Luke's Gospel (ch. xxiii), and a great group of discourses about 'the end' of which the same thing may be said (ch. xxiv). Judging from his general method, then, we should conclude that in the Sermon on the Mount we have grouped together sayings which probably were uttered in fact, as St. Luke represents, on different occasions. For it is St. Luke's intention throughout to present events 'in order,' and the sayings of Christ, each in its proper context.

But it must not be forgotten that a teacher who, like our Lord, teaches by way of 'sentences' or proverbs, is sure to repeat the same truth in different forms and from different points of view. Those who have examined Francis Bacon's note-books and published works tell us how those weighty sentences of his were written down again and again and reappear continually in slightly different shapes. So we may suppose it probable that our Lord frequently repeated similar utterances.

Thus if St. Luke truly represents that our Lord on a certain occasion consoled His dis-

ciples by short and emphatic benedictions pronounced on the actual poverty in which they lived and the actual persecutions which they endured—'Blessed are ye poor, blessed are ye that hunger now, blessed are ye that weep now, blessed are ye when men hate you'—it does not by any means follow that He did not on another occasion pronounce, as recorded by St. Matthew, similar benedictions, more numerous, more general, and more spiritual, beginning with one not now on certain actually poor men, but on the 'poor in spirit' in general. Thus on another occasion¹ He repeated the saying, 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God,' in the more spiritual form, 'How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.' Again, it does not follow that because He gave the pattern prayer in a shorter form, as recorded by St. Luke, He should not also have given it in the longer form, as recorded by St. Matthew.

The collection of our Lord's discourses which characterizes the first Gospel is—there is every reason to believe—the work of the apostle

¹ If the reading, and not the margin, of the R.V. be right in Mark x. 23, 24.

St. Matthew. If so, we need to remember that it was the work not only of a first-rate witness, but also of one whose memory, naturally retentive, was quickened by a special gift of the divine Spirit bestowed on the apostles 'to bring to their remembrance all that Christ had said unto them¹.'

¹ St. John xiv. 26.

CHAPTER II

THE BEATITUDES IN GENERAL

' And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain : and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him : and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'

OUR Lord went up into the mountain to get away from the multitudes. Thither He was fol-

lowed by His chosen disciples, and it is to them that the Sermon is uttered. It was spoken to the Church, not to the world; but as 'the multitudes' appear also to have listened¹ to it, we may say that it was spoken into the ear of the Church and overheard by the world.

1. It begins with the familiar 'Beatitudes.' They are a description of the character of the citizen of the new kingdom; that is, the character of the man who, enjoying the freedom of the kingdom of God, has entered into the inheritance of true blessedness. Observe, we have a description of a certain character, not of certain acts. Christ requires us not to do such and such things, but to be such and such people. And the character which we find here described is beyond all question nothing else than our Lord's own character put into words, the human character of our Lord corresponding always in flawless perfection with the teaching which He gave. Here are two reasons why our Lord's teaching is capable of universal and individual application: (1) because it is not made up of detailed commandments, but is the description of a character which, in its principles, can be apprehended and embodied in all possible

¹ St. Matt. vii. 28.

circumstances: (2) because it is not only a description in words but a description set side by side with a living example.

And we cannot remind ourselves too early that this is the character by which we shall be finally judged. It is 'by this man,' as St. Paul says, 'God will judge the world.' And St. John says 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is¹.' The estimate of our worth in God's sight depends simply on this, How like are we, or rather, how like are we becoming to the character of Christ? But of this we shall have opportunity of speaking later on.

2. The beatitudes describe the blessed life—in other words, the citizen of the new kingdom is one who can say with Mary 'all generations shall call me blessed.'

The idea of a blessed life had been common. We cannot begin to think about life without seeing that there are certain conditions which a man's life must have if we are to be able to congratulate him on being alive. What sort of life is worth living? That is a question thinking men have asked from old days. Gautama and Confucius, Plato and Aristotle asked it. What sort of life possesses the characteristics which

¹ Acts xvii. 31; 1 St. John iii. 2-3.

make it blessed—what sort of life can you congratulate a man, thoroughly and heartily, upon living?

Now observe a contrast in the answers given. To Gautama, the Buddha, the existence not merely of selfishness, but of the self, is a fundamental evil, delusion, and source of misery; and the true blessedness of painless peace is only to be attained by the emptying out of all desire, the extinction of all clinging to existence, and so at last by the extinction of life or personality itself. Thus though the Buddha's moral teaching has many beautiful resemblances to that of our Lord, it has this fundamental difference, that Buddha regarded personal existence as a delusion and an evil to be got rid of, but Christ as a supreme truth and good to be at last realized in the vision of God and the fruition of eternal life. 'I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly.'

Again, Aristotle asked the question, What is the blessed life? and he came to the conclusion that the life truly worth living was possible only for very few men. It was impossible for slaves, because they were the mere tools of other men; or for the diseased, because they were necessarily miserable; or for paupers, because they

had not a sufficiency of this world's goods ; or for those dying young, because they had not time enough to realize true blessedness. Observe, I say, the contrast in all this. Christ lays the blessed life open to all. And why ? Because He takes a man at once up to God : He centres his life on God : He puts him in full view of God as the goal of life : He bases life on God as a foundation. Again, as a consequence of this, He calculates life—as a life lived in God must be calculated—on the scale of eternity. Grant these two things—that each human life may be based on God and calculated on the scale of eternity—and you get rid of all the limitations which made Aristotle declare that neither the slave, nor the diseased, nor the poor, nor those who die young, can live the blessed life. Thus our Lord has described the character of true blessedness as belonging to man as man, to all men if they will have it, simply by the recognition of their true relation to God. From that point of view all accidents of life fade away into insignificance. They give, indeed, its special character to each life, and the conditions of its probation, but they cannot touch its true blessedness.

We can go one step farther. If you take the latter parts of the beatitudes, you will

find in them a more detailed account of the blessed life. The end of each beatitude tells us what our Lord meant by blessedness. 'Theirs is the kingdom of heaven; they shall be comforted; they shall inherit the earth; they shall be filled; they shall obtain mercy; they shall see God; they shall be called sons of God.' All the last six of these seven expressions may be said simply to expand the first. They amplify the idea of membership in the kingdom of heaven. Membership in the kingdom is a life of perfect relationship with man and nature based on perfect fellowship with God. That is true blessedness, and that is open to all. Therein is consolation after all troubles; there is the freedom to move about with a sense of heirship in God's world, as in our legitimate heritage and with no fear of being turned out; there is the satisfaction of all legitimate aspiration; there is gracious acceptance at all hands; there is the vision of all truth and beauty and goodness, in God; there is final and full recognition. That is true blessedness. That is the life which our Lord promises to every one who will simply put himself in the right relation to God.

3. There is only one more point that we need notice with regard to these beatitudes as a whole,

and it concerns their order. Our Lord begins with strong paradoxes: Blessed are the poor—the mourners—the meek. That is to say in other words, He first describes the true character by its contrast to the character of the world. We frequently have occasion to use the expression ‘the world.’ Let me, therefore, once for all explain what I understand by it when it is used in a bad sense. It means, of course, not God’s creation as such, which was pronounced very good. When ‘the world’ is spoken of in a bad sense—the worldly world—you may define it in this way: it is human society organizing itself apart from God. That is what in the Bible is meant by ‘the world.’ Well, the world notoriously clutches at all the gold it can get. The world avoids all the pain and suffering it possibly can, avoids it with a calculating selfishness. The world shrinks from nothing so much as from humiliation, and says ‘Assert yourself and your rights as much as you can.’ Our Lord then describes the true blessedness, first of all negatively in the first three beatitudes by strong and marked contrasts to the character of the world: blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the mourners. Then He goes on to give its positive characteristics:

its strong spiritual appetite for righteousness; its active and vigorous compassionateness; its single-mindedness or purity of heart; the deliberate aim it has to promote the kingdom of peace. Then, in the last beatitude, He answers the question how is such a character likely to find itself in such a world; and answers that question in terms very like those employed by a Jewish writer, possibly not very long before our Lord's time, the writer of the Book of Wisdom, who describes the attitude of the world towards the righteous thus:

' But let us lie in wait for the righteous man,
Because he is of disservice to us,
And is contrary to our works,
And upbraideth us with sins against the law,
And layeth to our charge sins against our discipline.
He professeth to have knowledge of God,
And nameth himself servant of the Lord.
He became to us a reproof of our thoughts.
He is grievous unto us even to behold,
Because his life is unlike other men's,
And his paths are of strange fashion.
We were accounted of him as base metal,
And he abstaineth from our ways as from uncleannesses.
The latter end of the righteous he calleth happy;
And he vaunteth that God is his father.
Let us see if his words be true,
And let us try what shall befall in the ending of his life.
For if the righteous man is God's son, he will uphold
him,

And he will deliver him out of the hand of his adversaries.
With outrage and torture let us put him to the test,
That we may learn his gentleness,
And may prove his patience under wrong.
Let us condemn him to a shameful death ;
For he shall be visited according to his words.

Thus reasoned they, and they were led astray ;
For their wickedness blinded them,
And they knew not the mysteries of God,
Neither hoped they for wages of holiness,
Nor did they judge that there is a prize for blameless
souls¹.

‘ Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and
persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you
falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad :
for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted
they the prophets which were before you.’

¹ Wisdom ii. 12 ff.

CHAPTER III

THE BEATITUDES IN DETAIL

i.

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

mat. 5.3

THE Old Testament is full of descriptions of the spirit of the world, the spirit of selfish wealth with its attendant cruelty: and by contrast to this are descriptions of the oppressed poor who are the friends of God. Our Lord took up all this language upon His own lips when, as St. Luke records, He turned to His disciples and said ‘Blessed are ye poor . . . woe unto you that are rich.’ But all the actually poor are not the disciples of Christ. It is possible to combine the selfishness and grasping avarice of ‘the rich’ with the condition of poverty. So our Lord has, as recorded by St. Matthew, gone beneath the surface and based His kingdom, the character of His citizens, not upon actual

poverty, but upon detachment. The world says 'Get all you can, and keep it.' Christ says, Blessed are those who at least in heart and will have nothing.

There is one verse in the Old Testament which describes this poverty of spirit. It is the utterance of Job¹: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' There is pure, perfect detachment. Job took and used aright what God gave him, adoring the sovereignty of God. The sovereign took away what He had given; Job gave it up freely. Being detached—that is poverty of spirit; at the least, 'having food and covering, let us be therewith content².'

Our Lord says then, Blessed are those who are thus detached; and of course we look to Him for illustration, for these beatitudes express His own character. He was detached. The Incarnation was a self-emptying. He clung not to all the glories of heaven, but 'emptied Himself' and 'beggared Himself,' as St. Paul says³. Then when He had been born a man, He set the example of clinging to nothing external. He abandoned ease, popularity, the favour of the great, even the sympathy of His

¹ Job i. 21.

² 1 Tim. vi. 8.

³ Phil. ii. 7, 2 Cor. viii. 9.

friends, even, last and greatest of all, on the cross, the consolation of the divine presence. Each privilege in turn was abandoned without a murmur, not, speaking generally, on the ascetic principle, but because moral obedience to God in fulfilment of His mission required it. He became utterly naked, poorer than the poorest; therefore in a supreme sense 'His was the kingdom of heaven.' He stood empty, persecuted, before Pilate, and said 'Thou sayest that I am a king'; and the moral conscience of the world has witnessed that He spoke truth. So we, like Him, are to be ready to surrender, ready to give up; and in proportion to this detachment, in proportion as we do really in will adore the sovereignty of God, and are ready to receive and to give up according to His will, in that proportion are all the hindrances removed by which the royalty of His kingdom is prevented from entering into our hearts and lives. St. Paul's comment on this first beatitude lies in his description of the apostles 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things'; or in his encouragement to Christians generally 'All things are yours'.¹ The wilfulness with which we cling to supposed 'necessaries of life,'

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 10, 1 Cor. iii. 21.

'things we cannot do without'; false claims on life for enjoyments which we should be the stronger for dispensing with; false ideals of vanity and display—these, and not our circumstances, are the hindrances to that largeness of heart and peace and liberty and joy, which have their root only in the bare and naked relation of the soul to God.

The splendid promise attached to this beatitude brings it into contrast with an old Jewish saying which has many parallels, 'Ever be more and more lowly in spirit, for the prospect of man is to become the food of worms.' The motive to humility which our Lord suggests is very different.

Before we pass on, let us observe how important it is that there should be at all times those in the Church who are capable, not merely of poverty in spirit, but voluntarily of poverty in fact. Upon all men our Lord enjoins detachment. But upon one young man in particular He enjoined that he should give his possessions away, that he should sell all that he had and give to the poor. So in the Church there have been those who in the religious orders have dedicated themselves in voluntary poverty to the service of God and of man; and the Church has lost incalculably in ages when there have

*a man
in the
sermon
on the mount*

been none such. Like all other institutions, the religious orders have been liable to great abuses: they have been homes very often, not so much of scandalous vices, as of sloth and corporate greed; but we must not give up the ideal because there are abuses. There is the command of the Lord to all to be, like Job, detached; there is the counsel of the Lord to some to be, in fact, voluntarily poor.

ii.

‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.’

These beatitudes follow one another, as St. Chrysostom says, in a golden chain. Once again our Lord is putting Himself in startling opposition to one of the favourite maxims of the world. The world says ‘Get as much pleasure as you can out of life; suck it in wherever you can; and hug yourself as close as you can from all that disquiets you or makes you uncomfortable; in a word, get as much pleasure and avoid as much pain as by intelligence and forethought you can possibly do.’ In startling opposition to this maxim of the world our Lord puts His maxim ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’

What does that mean? Briefly: there are

two chief kinds of mourning into which it is the duty of every true servant of our Lord to enter – the mourning for sin and the mourning for pain. We must mourn for sin, for we are sinners. It is possible to hide the fact from our eyes, to prevent the inconvenient light from coming in upon our consciences, to suppose that things that are widely tolerated must be tolerable, that things that are frequently or habitually done must have something to say for themselves. But the Christian gets into the light; he lets the light of the divine word go down into his heart; he strives to see himself first, in the silence of his own soul, as the Lord sees him. Thus he is brought to repentance, and repentance which is in regard to the future a ‘change of purpose,’ is with respect to the past a true mourning: if not emotional sorrow, still profound and heartfelt regret on account of those things in which we have gone against the will of God: and ‘blessed are they that mourn.’

Next to this mourning for sin is the mourning of sympathy with others’ pain. There are moments when a Christian may legitimately, like his Lord in the garden of Gethsemane, be engrossed in the bearing of ‘his own burden¹.’ But

¹ Gal. vi. 5.

in the main a Christian ought, like his Lord, or like St. Paul, to have his own burden so well in hand, that he is able to leave the large spaces of his heart for other people to lay their sorrows upon. 'Bear ye one another's burdens¹.' Of our Lord it was said 'Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases²'—not on the cross simply, but as He moved about in Galilee and Judaea, and the sad, the sorrowful and the sick came to Him. It is always possible to use the advantages of a comparatively prosperous position to exempt ourselves, to screen ourselves off, from the common lot of pain. This is to shut ourselves off from true fruitfulness and final joy. 'Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life, loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal³.' 'Blessed are they that mourn.'

'He that lacks time to mourn, lacks time to mend.
Eternity mourns that. 'Tis an ill cure
For life's worst ills, to have no time to feel them.
Where sorrow's held intrusive and turn'd out
There wisdom will not enter, nor true power,
Nor aught that dignifies humanity.'

¹ Gal. vi. 2.² St. Matt. viii. 17.³ St. John xii. 24, 25.

And in proportion to the fullness with which you enter into penitence for sin and into sympathy for the sufferings of men, you shall get, not the miserable laughter of forgetfulness, which lasts but for a moment, but the comfort (or encouragement) of God. 'That we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God¹.' 'The sorrow of the world worketh death,' but 'godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of².' 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.'

And here, by way of warning, let me point out that there is a false as well as a true mourning. It is possible to be discontented with the world but to lack the courage of faith which makes our discontent fruitful of reform. It is possible to be discontented with ourselves, and yet never so simply and humbly make our confession to God our Father as to get the joy which comes of being forgiven. We are discontented; but our discontent is pride, not the humility of true sorrow. It will not be comforted, it will not thankfully take the divine offer of absolution. The 'woman that was a sinner' made

¹ 2 Cor. i. 4.

² 2 Cor. vii. 10.

no delay in believing herself forgiven, but set to work at once to show the love which springs of gratitude in the heart of those who accept their release. The false sorrow of pride was noticed by one of the leaders of monasticism in the west—Cassian, who describes and contrasts thus the true sorrow and the false¹:

‘But that sorrow which “worketh repentance unto stable salvation” is obedient, approachable, humble, amiable, gentle and patient, inasmuch as it comes down from the love of God and, inspired with the desire of perfection, gives itself over unweariedly to all pain of body and contrition of spirit; and having a happiness of its own and a vitality which comes from the hope of progress, it keeps all the amiability of an approachable and patient disposition, possessing in itself all the fruits of the Holy Spirit which the apostle enumerates. But the false sorrow is bitter, impatient, hard, full of rancour and fruitless grief, and penal despair, breaking off and recalling the man whom it has got into its grasp from industry and salutary sorrow, because it is irrational, and not only impedes the efficacy of prayers but also empties out of

¹ *Institutes*, ix. 11.

the soul all those spiritual fruits which the true sorrow knows how to impart.'

iii.

'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.'

Still our Lord is explaining the character of the kingdom by contrast to the ideals of the world. The world says 'Stand up for your rights; make the most of yourself; don't let any man put upon you.' And so we are always standing on our dignity, always thinking ourselves insulted or imposed upon. 'Blessed are the meek,' our Lord says. The meek—that is manifestly, those who are ready to be put upon as far as they themselves are concerned. This is the character of our Lord, who, 'when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously¹.'

Of course, from another point of view, we may be quite bound from time to time to assert ourselves. Our Lord recognizes that, as we shall have an opportunity of noticing in another connexion. We may have to assert ourselves for the sake of the moral order of the church

¹ 1 Peter ii. 23.

and of the world. But no one gets true peace, or has really got to the foundation of things, until, as far as his own dignity is concerned, he is in a position to say, You can wrong God and you can wrong society; and it may be my duty to stand up for God and for society; but me, as far as I am concerned, you cannot provoke. That is the ideal to which we have to attain. That is the meekness which is appropriate to sinners like ourselves who know what we deserve, who *on a general review of life* can seldom feel that we are suffering unmerited wrong; but it is the meekness also of the sinless and righteous one.

And the result of this entire absence of self-assertion is that we can make no claim on the world which God will not at the last substantiate. 'Blessed are the meek'—our Lord is here quoting the psalm—'for they shall *inherit* the earth¹.' What is an heir? An heir is a person who enters into rightful possession. He is in no fear that any other can ever come and turn him out. He moves at ease amongst his possessions, because the things that he inherits are really his. No one with a better claim can come to oust him. Now, if we go about the world

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 29.

making claims on society which God does not authorize, refusing to bear what God will have us bear, the day will come when the true Master appears, and we shall be exposed to shame. We have made claims which He did not authorize; we have asserted ourselves where He gave us no right or title to assert ourselves; we shall be ousted. But the meek, who ever committed themselves to Him that judgeth righteously, have nothing to fear. 'Friend, come up higher,' is all that is before them. They will simply, in steady and royal advance, enter into the full heritage of that which men kept back from them, but God has in store for them.

iv.

W. 5. 6
'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.'

In strong, bold outlines our Lord has begun by sketching for us the character of His citizens in marked contrast to the ideals of the world. But He is not satisfied with giving us these, as it were, negative characteristics; He passes on to more positive traits. The citizens of the new kingdom 'hunger and thirst after righteousness.' Every one knows what appetite is, what

hunger and thirst mean. It is a strong craving, a craving which must be satisfied, or we perish. You cannot forget that you are hungry or thirsty. And in human pursuits we again and again see what is like hunger and thirst. You see an appetite for place; a man is bent upon it; he will by whatever means get that position which his soul desires. So again you see in men's amusements a similar craving. Go to the side of the Thames at Putney, and you may see two crews of eight men practising there for a famous race, their supporters and backers looking on. All is eagerness, and there is not the slightest betrayal of consciousness that anything in the world could be more important than the winning of that race. That is what may be truly called a hunger and thirst. And such is the appetite for righteousness which possesses the citizens of our Lord's kingdom. Righteousness, or rather *the* righteousness, that character which God has marked out for us, the character of Christ—blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after it.

Brethren, we so often feel hopeless about getting over our faults. Let us hunger and thirst after righteousness, and we shall be filled. As our Lord saw of the travail of His soul and was

satisfied, so, depend upon it, shall we. If you only seriously want to be good, your progress may be slow, but at the last you will be good. Christ is pledged to satisfy, if only you will go on wanting. There is not in the pursuit of goodness any failure except in ceasing to hunger and thirst—that is, in ceasing to want, to pray, to try. Do you want righteousness seriously, deliberately? Then you can have it, and not for yourself only, but for the world. ‘Till righteousness turn again unto judgement, all such as are true in heart shall follow it.’ It is pledged to us. The day will come when the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of righteousness and meekness and truth, shall be an established and a visible fact. Blessed are they that here and now hunger and thirst after righteousness in themselves and in the world: for they shall be filled.

V.

‘Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.’

Of course wherever human misery is, there is also human pity. But, apart from Christ, it was not thought of as a motive force, to be used in redeeming others’ lives and in enriching our own. The Buddha, indeed, one of the purest

and noblest men who have ever lived, was first awakened from the dream of luxury, in which he had been brought up, by the threefold spectacle of human misery—decrepitude, disease and death. And once awakened, he made his 'great renunciation': he abandoned his royal state: after much searching, he discovered for himself, as he thought, the way of emancipation from life and, being filled with compassion, taught it to others. But he believed life to be radically an evil. He could imagine no redemption of life but only escape from it. The philosopher Aristotle, who examined and catalogued human qualities, could not have failed to come across the fact of pity. But he seems even to have regarded it as a troublesome emotion—a disturbing force which had better be got rid of in practical concerns. The Greek tragedy, which by its marvellous presentations of the weakness of man was calculated to evoke the sentiment of pity in great intensity, he regarded as a vent or outlet for the emotion which in this way could be purged off and leave the Greek citizen in untroubled serenity in face of actual life. It is to be feared that we very often use the drama and literature in this way. We let our emotion of pity be stirred by the

pictures of human misfortune presented to us, and we find a luxury in the indulgence of the emotion. But it is a luxury, and nothing more. It leads to no effective action for the removing of the misery which we deplore. This is pagan. For the disciple of Christ pity is a motive to vigorous action. God in Christ declares His 'power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity.' Powerful pity is pity which passes from emotion into practical and redemptive action. Of such pity only does Christ say 'Blessed are the merciful or pitiful.' Compassion which does nothing is in the New Testament¹ regarded as a form of pernicious hypocrisy.

And the merciful shall obtain mercy. Here we get a great law of the divine dealing. God deals with us as we deal with our fellow-men. In the Old Testament² it is said 'With the merciful thou, God, wilt show thyself merciful; with the perfect man thou wilt show thyself perfect; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the perverse thou wilt show thyself forward.' And again, in our Lord's parable³, when the servant who had been let off his debts by his master was found to deal unmercifully with

¹ St. James ii. 15-16; 1 John iii. 16-18.

² Ps. xviii. 24-26.

³ St. Matt. xviii. 23 f.

his fellow-servant who was indebted to him, the remission was cancelled, and the weight of his old debt fell back upon him, to teach us that God deals with us as we deal with our fellow-men. Thus again, in view of the last great day, our Lord says 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom.' So in our Lord's Prayer, we pray 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Do we want to know how our Lord will regard us at the last day? We can find the answer by considering how our face looks, not in mere passing emotion, but in its serious and deliberate aspect, towards our fellow-men. God deals with us then, as we deal with our fellows. Nor need we confine the principle to God's dealings with us. The same law is observable in the treatment we receive at men's hands. On the whole we can determine men's attitude to us by our attitude to them. Almost all men have their best selves drawn out towards a really compassionate life. 'Perchance for a *good* man—one who is not only just, but good—some would even dare to die¹.' 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'

¹ Rom. v. 7.

vi.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.’

If we are to take part in the kingdom, there must be singleness of purpose. Purity of heart is, of course, continually taken in its narrower meaning of absence of sensual defilement and pollution. That is an important part of purity; and may I say a word about the pursuit of purity in this narrower sense? A great many people are distressed by impure temptations, and they very frequently fail to make progress with them for one reason, namely, that while they are anxious to get rid of sin in this one respect, they are not trying after goodness as a whole. Uncleanliness of life and heart they dislike. It weighs upon their conscience and destroys their self-respect. But they have no similar horror of pride, or irreverence, or uncharity. People very often say that it is impossible to lead a ‘pure’ life. The Christian minister is not pledged to deny this, if a man will not try to be religious all round, to be Christ-like altogether. For the way to get over uncleanness is, in innumerable cases, not to fight against that only, but to contend for positive holiness all round, for Christ-likeness, for purity of heart in the sense in

which Christ used the expression, in the sense in which in the 51st Psalm a clean heart is coupled with a 'right spirit'—that is, a will set straight towards God, or simplicity of purpose. There is an old Latin proverb—'Unless the vessel is clean, whatever you pour into it turns sour.' It is so with the human will. Unless the human will is directed straight for God, whatever you put into the life of religious and moral effort has a root of bitterness and sourness in it which spoils the whole life. Our Lord means 'Blessed are the single-minded,' for they, though as yet they may be far from seeing God, though as yet they may not believe a single article of the Christian Creed, yet at last shall attain the perfect vision; yes, as surely as God is true, they shall be satisfied in their every capacity for truth and beauty and goodness; they shall behold God.

Any measure of true spiritual illumination, like that of Job when the Lord had answered his questionings, may be described as 'seeing God'; and in this sense to see God is a necessary preliminary to repentance¹ and is requisite for

¹ Job xlii. 5, St. Luke v. 8; and cf. the vision which is the beginning of purification after death in Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*.

spiritual endurance¹. But in its full sense it is incompatible with any remaining dissatisfaction; it is the final goal of human efforts, the reward of those who here are content to 'walk by faith, not by sight,' and it includes in perfection—what in a measure all discovery after search includes—satisfaction for the intellect, and full attainment for the will, and the ecstasy of the heart, in God as He is.

vii.

'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.'

Christ is the Prince of Peace. He brings about peace among men, breaking down all middle walls of partition between classes and races and individuals, by making them first of all at peace with God—atonement among men by way of atonement with God. This is the only secure basis of peace. There are many kinds of false and superficial peace, which the Prince of Peace only comes to break up. 'I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword.'² Peace can never be purchased in God's way by the sacrifice of truth. But peace in the truth we, like our Master, must be for ever pursuing.

¹ Hebr. xi. 27.

² St. Matt. x. 34.

Do we habitually remember how it offends our Lord to see divisions in the Christian Church, nations nominally Christian armed to the teeth against one another, class against class and individual against individual in fierce and relentless competition, jealousies among clergy and church-workers, communicants who forget that the sacrament of union with Christ is the sacrament of union also with their fellow-men?

Christians are to be makers of Christ's peace. Something we can all do to reconcile individuals, families, classes, churches, nations. The question is, Are we, as churchmen and citizens, by work and by prayer, in our private conduct and our public action, doing our utmost with deliberate, calculated, unsparing effort? If so our benediction is the highest: it is to be, and to be acknowledged as being, sons of God.

viii.

'Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

There has now been given the picture of the Christian character in its wonderful attractiveness—that detachment, that readiness to enter

into the heritage of human pain, that self-suppressing meekness and humility towards our fellow-men, that strong passion for righteousness, that effective compassion, that singleness of heart, that striving for peace. Yet, where it is not welcomed, it stings by its very beauty, it hardens by its very holiness. Thus there came about the strange result, that when that character was set in its perfection before men's eyes in the person of our Lord, they would not have it. They set upon Him and slew Him. It is in full view of this consequence of being righteous that our Lord speaks this last beatitude: and He gives it pointed and particular application to His disciples.

'Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'

The place of the Christian character in the world.

As soon as ever a man sets himself seriously to aim at this Christian character, the devil at once puts this thought into his mind—Am I not aiming at what is too high to be practicable? am I not aiming too high to do any

These are the things of the present Christian era

good? If I am to help men, surely I must be like them? I must not be so unworldly, if I am to help men in this sort of world. Now our Lord at once anticipates this kind of argument. He says at once, as it were, No, you are to help men by being unlike them. You are to help men, not by offering them a character which they shall feel to be a little more respectable than their own, but by offering them a character filled with the love of God. They may mock it for a while; but in the 'day of visitation,' in the day when trouble comes, in the day when they are thrown back on what lies behind respectability, in the day when first principles emerge, they will glorify God for the example you have given them. They will turn to you then, because they will feel that you have something to show them that will really hold water, something that is really and eternally worth having.

Thus our Lord at once proceeds to answer the question, How is a character such as the beatitudes describe, planted in a world such as this is, to effect good? It is to purify by its own distinctive savour, it is to be conspicuous by its own splendid truth to its ideal, it is to arrest attention by its powerful contrast to the world

about it. This is the meaning of the metaphors which follow the beatitudes :

12.12
'Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.'

'Ye are the salt of the earth.' Salt is that which keeps things pure by its emphatic antagonistic savour. 'Ye are the light of the world.' Light is that which burns distinctively in the darkness. 'A city that is set on a hill' is a marked object, arresting attention over a whole country side.

'Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ?' The savour of a Christianity which does not mean what it says, wherewith can it be salted ? How can it recover its position and influence ? Would it not be better never to have been Christians at all than to be Christians who do not mean what they say ? What is so useless as a hollow profession of religion ? 'It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.' 'I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee

out of my mouth¹.’ Christians exist in order to make the contrast of their own lives apparent to the world.

‘Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’

We may point the significance of this teaching of our Lord by contrasting it with that of another great religious teacher. We have often heard it said that more people are good Mohammedans in Mohammedan countries than good Christians in Christian countries. That may be true, and for this reason: Mohammed set before his disciples an ideal of conduct calculated to commend itself naturally to the people he had to do with. Supposing no fundamental change of character, no real transformation, was required of them, he saw that they would be ready enough to observe religious ceremonies, and to fight, and to abstain from drink. He fastened on these things. These, he said, are what God requires of you. And he has won a high measure of

¹ Rev. iii. 15-16. These words mean, I think, not ‘I would that ye, the Church of Laodicea, were either morally worse than ye are or morally better’; but ‘I would that either ye were not Christians at all or better Christians.’

success on the average. Mohammedans have been conspicuous for courage and temperance and regularity in the transaction of religious forms. But just because Mohammed was so easily satisfied, his religion has been a religion of stagnation. He neither aimed at nor effected any regeneration of man.

But our Lord said 'Except a man be born again,'—i. e. unless so fundamental a change take place in him, that it can only be compared to a fresh birth—'he cannot see the kingdom of God.' And He made it plain that the working out of this new birth would not be possible without the sternest self-denial. For this very reason our Lord's religion has found fewer *genuine* adherents than Mohammedanism, but by means of those who have been genuine adherents it has effected a profound spiritual renewal even in society as a whole.

No doubt the Church has often seemed to forget her Lord's method. There have been times—as at the baptism of the Franks—when the Church incorporated men in masses, allowing the Christian standard to be lowered almost indefinitely, in order that a whole race might be called Christian. So, again, there was a time when Jesuit casuists said (in effect), if only we

can keep people Catholic, making their confessions and receiving absolution, it shall be done at any cost of accommodation to existing morals. Once more, the Church of England, in order to maintain the ideal of 'a national Church,' has in result allowed almost all the power of spiritual discipline, which she should have kept in her own hand, to be surrendered to a Parliament which is in the loosest possible relation to Christianity of any kind.

In each of these cases the Church abandoned the method of Christ: she sacrificed reality to numbers, or genuine discipleship to supposed political influence, and as a result in each case the salt lost its savour.

The question remains for us 'Wherewith can it be salted?' Is the savour of true Christianity among us so far gone as to be irrecoverable? We thankfully answer No. But if we are to make good our denial, we must set to work to let men understand that, as the Church has a creed which she cannot let go, and a ministry and sacraments which are committed to her to exercise and to dispense, so she has a moral standard, which, if she is not to fall under the curse of barrenness, she must re-erect and be true to. Only when men have come to under-

stand what the Christian moral standard is—in marriage and in the home, in commerce and in politics—and to understand that it can no more be dispensed with than the creed or the sacraments, is there any prospect of a healthy revival of church life.



CHAPTER IV

THE REVISION OF THE OLD LAW

THE character of the citizens of the new kingdom as described by our Lord was so surprising, so paradoxical, that it was inevitable the question should arise, Was He a revolutionary who had come to upset and destroy all the old law—was this a revolutionary movement in the moral and religious world? To this question, then, our Lord directly addressed Himself. The rest of the first chapter of the Sermon on the Mount—St. Matthew v. 17 to the end—is simply a statement of the relation in which this new righteousness, this righteousness of the new kingdom, stands to the old righteousness of the Mosaic Law.

Our Lord explains that the new law stands in a double relation to the old. First, it is in direct continuity with what had gone before (vv. 17-19); and, secondly (vv. 20-48), it supersedes it, as the complete supersedes the incomplete.

Mosaic Law was the law of the old kingdom or rather suited to these early times but not complete. It did not present an ideal a perfect Man for man's imitation as Christ.

(1) The continuity is thus stated:

‘Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’

Here we get the divine principle of action. God does not despair of what is imperfect because it is imperfect. He views every institution (or person) not as it is, but as it is becoming; not by the level of its present attainment, but by the character and direction of its movement. Everything that is moving in the right direction is destined in the divine providence to reach its fulfilment. This was the case pre-eminently with the Old Testament. It was imperfect, but its tendency was directed aright. As St. Irenaeus says ‘The commandments are common to the Jews and us: with them they had their beginning and origin, with us their development and completion¹.’ And St. Augustine: ‘The New Testament is latent in the Old, and the Old Testament is patent in the New².’ Here then

¹ C. haer. iv. 13. 4.

² Quaest. 73 in Exod.

we have our chief object-lesson in the method of divine education. If we examine the matter in detail, we shall see that in the New Testament every element in the Old Testament finds itself fulfilled.

Is it prophecy, in the sense of prediction? In the Old Testament an ideal is projected into the future by inspired men, and in Christ and His kingdom it is realized. Moreover, if you look to the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles or to St. Matthew's Gospel, you will see how full the early Christians were of the sense of this realization, of the sense that in the Old Testament is a forecast and in the New a fulfilment. Or is it the ritual law? You study its enactments in Leviticus; and then you read the Epistle to the Hebrews. You see how, to the mind of the spiritual Jewish-Christian writer, in the old law is external symbol and in Christ spiritual realization. Or is it the moral law? You compare the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament with our Lord's Sermon on the Mount or St. James' Epistle. They stand to one another as preliminary education to final enlightenment. And in another sense law altogether is represented by St. Paul as only the training of slaves or children in preparation for the sonship or

manhood which is reached when the Spirit is given.

Or, once more, is it types of character that are in question? You know the old difficulty about Jacob and Esau. How can we approve of Jacob who was so deceitful? How can we disapprove of Esau who was so generous and impulsive? The answer is a deep and true one. It is that Esau's impulsive nature led to nothing; he was 'profane'¹; in fact, Edom—the race of which Esau is the parent and type—produced nothing, changed nothing, brought nothing to perfection. Jacob, for all his mendacity, knew what it was to be in covenant with God, and his race grew into the likeness of God. Israel led to something.

All the imperfect elements in the Old Testament—and, of course, they are imperfect—reach fulfilment in the New. They enshrine the will of God at a certain stage. Therefore they are worthy of respect. They are to be realized, not violated. And so our Lord goes on to warn His disciples lest, in the enthusiasm of the new teaching, they should think that they could best show their zeal by disparaging elements in the old law under which they had been brought up.

¹ Hebr. xii. 16.

For it is always the case that when people have learned something new, their first impulse is to show what they have learned by disparaging what they knew before. Thus our Lord warns them of the low place in His kingdom which they will hold who exhibit towards even the details of the older teaching a spirit of destructiveness, and of the high esteem which will be accorded to the reverent handling of it.

(2) Then our Lord passes to the other side of the question. The old law was imperfect; the new law is to supersede it. The new law is to supersede it both as it is represented in the actual standard of its professors, the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20), and then, more than that, it is to supersede it even in its actual principles (vv. 21-48).

First, as regards its professors :

‘For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.’

It is well known what the scribes and Pharisees represented. They had left out of consideration the prophetic teaching in the Old Testament and the prophetic element in the books of Moses—all that made light of outward observances by contrast with moral holiness or, still

M. 20

4.11.18

more, as divorced from it. They had made the observance of the ceremonies 'the be-all and the end-all' of religion. Thus their religion was pre-eminently external and, as such, unprogressive. It was a religion, again, which with the help of dispensations and evasions could be practised without much spiritual or moral effort. Hence it ministered to self-satisfaction and hypocrisy. Thus our Lord continually judges it, and here He warns His disciples not to suppose that His revision of the old law is to result in the establishment of an easier religion than that of scribes and Pharisees. The requirement of obedience will be deeper and more searching.

But our Lord goes back behind the professors upon the law itself; and He proceeds in detail to deal with the old moral law, in order to deepen it into the law of His new kingdom.

There are two points to which I would call attention, which apply to all these modifications or deepenings of the old law.

First, notice the authority of the teacher. 'It was said *to* them of old time'—that is by God Himself in the Mosaic Law—Thou shalt not do this or that; 'but I say unto you.' Now this is a new tone, and it has only one legitimate explanation. All the prophets had said 'Thus

saith the Lord': they had spoken the word of another. Jesus says 'I say unto you,' thus giving one of many indications that He who spoke was different in kind from all other speakers upon earth; that He was the fount of the moral law, and could speak as the one supreme legislator with the voice, with the authority, of God Himself.

Secondly, notice that when our Lord deals with the different commandments, He deals with them on principles which in each case would apply to all the others. You could take the distinctive principle which emerges in His dealing with the law of murder or of adultery, and apply it to the case of all the other commandments¹. This is only one instance which goes to prove that our Lord does not mean to save us trouble. He teaches in a way which leaves us a great deal to do for ourselves, and requires of us a great deal of moral thoughtfulness.

The law of murder.

Ex. 21, 22

'Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement: but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgement; and whosoever shall say to his brother,

¹ This is drawn out in Appendix ii, p. 206.

Raca [vain fellow !], shall be in danger of the council ; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.'

In explanation of this let us look at the Second Book of the Chronicles. 'And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, Consider what ye do : for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord ; and he is with you in the judgement. Now therefore let the fear of the Lord be upon you ; take heed and do it : for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts. Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites and the priests, and of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel, for the judgement of the Lord, and for controversies ¹.'

King Jehoshaphat is here said to have appointed a central court in Jerusalem and local courts in all the towns ; and the arrangement was permanent. The local court or Sanhedrin is apparently what is meant by 'the judgement' in this passage of the Sermon, and the central court or supreme Sanhedrin is what is meant by 'the council.' Now certain even capital offences could be dealt with by the local

¹ 2 Chron. xix. 5-8, cf. Josephus *Antiq.* IV. viii. 14.

courts, but the gravest only by the central Sanhedrin. Thus there was a gradation of crimes. Moreover, the Jews believed in an awful penalty after death for those who had egregiously sinned. Gehenna—that is, the Valley of Hinnom, close to Jerusalem—was the place where children had been burnt alive in sacrifice to Moloch; and it had become later a metaphor for the place of punishment after death. Thus, it appears, the Jews recognized ordinary offences which came before the local court, special offences which came before the central court, and an awful penalty after death for the worst sort of offences.

Now, no offence was brought under the cognizance of the Jewish law at all which was not a sin in act; the sin of actual murder for instance. But our Lord raises the whole standard of guilt. He takes no account of sins of act at all. In the citizens of His new kingdom, sins of act are, as it were, out of the question. The way He deals with the law—specifically the law of murder, but in principle all the laws—is, if we may paraphrase His words, this: Under the new law you are to think of malicious anger, of anger and malice entertained in your hearts, as under the old law men were accus-

tomed to think of ordinary homicide. **W**
 this malice of heart expresses itself in the **v**
 of dislike and contempt, that is a graver offence
 and shall have attached to it the same measure of
 guilt as would in the old days have brought
 a man before the central court. And
 stronger expression of reprobation, 'Thou shalt not
 is a sin which may bring a man into eternal
 punishment. 'He is liable (literally) up to the
 point of the Gehenna of fire.'

Our Lord certainly speaks in metaphor.
 cause obviously one could not in fact bring
 a man under any earthly tribunal for the thoughts
 of his heart. But the meaning is plain.
 Lord raises deliberately allowed sins of thought
 and feeling to the level previously occupied by
 overt acts; and words He counts yet greater
 sins; and the deliberate expression of hatred.
 He counts a sin which may destroy the soul.

This is the way in which He deals with the
 sixth commandment (though it would apply to
 all the others). And then He adds a short
 parenthesis dealing with the duty of haste
 to remove any uncharitable relation in which
 we may stand towards others.

'If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar
 there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee

h. 5. 23-26

thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art with him in the way ; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou have paid the last farthing.'

Our Lord is speaking to Jews who were accustomed to bring their offerings into the temple. He says that if one of them, while engaged in this religious observance, should remember that his brother has aught against him, he is to leave his gift before the altar and to go away hastily, as a man who is leaving an unfinished work, and be reconciled ; and then come back and offer his gift. It is to be done quickly. This is emphasized in a second metaphor. In case of a debt you would have to act quickly, or the law would be in train and extreme consequences would follow. So in moral offences go quickly and satisfy ; purge your conscience and get free ; suffer no delay ; otherwise the moral consequences will be in train, and the issue inevitable, and the final result follow.

He speaks to Jews, but he also speaks to Christians. It is the law of the new kingdom. We have an altar. We have to offer up

spiritual sacrifices, the worship of God in spirit and in truth. Thus in the course of the first century Jewish Christians apparently applied this saying of our Lord to the Holy Communion. In *The Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*¹ you find: 'Let no man who has a dispute with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled [the word in St. Matt. v. 24], that your sacrifice be not defiled.' Surely we need to lay to heart this teaching, that we are to *make haste to get rid of whatever hinders our approach to God*. We Englishmen are so apt to pride ourselves on not being hypocrites. It was once said to me, and the saying has always remained in my mind, that the great need in our day is to preach against the Pharisaism of the publican! How many say, 'I don't come to the sacrament: a man who has to knock about and make his way in the world must do things and put up with things which if one comes to the sacrament one is supposed to repent of. And if I do not profess to be impossibly strict, at least I am not a hypocrite.' So he goes off. 'Lord, I thank thee that I am not one of these hypocrites: I make no religious professions, thank

¹ *Did.* xiv. 2.

God!’ Now this is what I call the Pharisaism of the publican. Pharisaism is being satisfied with ourselves. And the Pharisaism of the man who makes no religious professions is at least as bad as the Pharisaism of the man who abounds in them. Our Lord does not bid us abstain from coming to the altar if we are not fit, but He says, See to it that you make yourselves fit; and that too in a hurry. ‘Leave there thy gift before the altar,’ but you cannot leave it long. It will be in the way there. There is an unfinished work which you are engaged in. Make haste to come back and finish it. If among my readers are some who belong to the Church and are not communicants, and are satisfied because they are not hypocrites, I would say to them—do not be satisfied: begin to approach the altar: commit yourself to it, by telling your wife or husband, or friend or parish priest, that you hope to receive the Communion, and when; and then go your ways quickly and remove the moral obstacles which hinder your doing so; otherwise the moral train will be set in motion, and the great and inevitable issue come before you know it.

There is one other point which I will ask you

to notice—our Lord's use in this passage of the word 'brother.' In the Bible the term 'brother' is confined to those who belong to the covenant; in the old law to the Jews, in the new law to the Christians. Our Lord then is here dealing with the relation of Christian to Christian, who have realized their brotherhood in the common fatherhood of God. All men are meant for brotherhood, but our Lord is speaking here to those who are brothers in fact.

The law of adultery.

'Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'

We notice that our Lord here brings to light a fresh principle. In the case of the sixth commandment He notes the sin of allowing even the feeling of hatred; but he *distinguishes* the guilt of an allowed *feeling*, not only from that of an act, but also from that of a word. But here our Lord *identifies* with the overt act in guilt even the desire of the heart when it reaches the point of deliberate *intention* to sin. The man whom our Lord is here considering must be supposed to have the deliberate intention to

is of not a sin
entertain a
wicked thought
without committing
intention to carry
it out. For then
it is a better
thing every day
that it is long
than it is morally
of mischief

sin; he looks on the woman *in order to*¹ excite his lust; he is only restrained from action (if it be so) by lack of opportunity or fear of consequences; in his will and intention he has already committed the act. Our Lord then says that to will to sin and deliberately to stimulate sin in oneself has in His sight all the guilt of sin, even though circumstances may restrain one from the actual commission of it. This again is a principle which applies to other commandments besides the seventh.

Then, in view of the difficulty of sexual purity, our Lord goes on to urge men to take those necessary steps in the way of self-discipline, which will enable them to be preserved from sin:

‘And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell.’

Here our Lord lays down the important principle of asceticism or self-discipline, and we

¹ Cf. vi. 1, ‘in order to be seen of men,’ where the phrase is the same and describes the deliberate motive.